

## **BLACKWOOD TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT GROUP – 28TH APRIL 2005**

**SUBJECT: TOWN CENTRE DEVELOPMENT**

**REPORT BY: ANDREW HIGHWAY**

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### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To provide an insight into Town Centre Management and how it relates to the future development of Blackwood Town Centre.

### **2. SUMMARY**

The Local Authority has recently appointment a Town Centre Development Manager for the three Town Centres of Blackwood, Bargoed and Caerphilly. The role will focus on how each Town Centre develops and progresses to reach its full potential. This report sets out a number of areas in which Town Centres can develop and considers specifics relating to Blackwood Town Centre.

### **3. TOWN CENTRE DEVELOPMENT**

- 3.1 The protecting and enhancing of town centres is one of the key drivers for regeneration, enabling them to establish themselves as the first choice for the commercial and retail sector. It is vital that the Town Centre offers a mixture of attractions to draw a variety of people at different times of the day and night.
- 3.2 Individual Town Centres will develop in line with their communities needs; retail provision such as a seven day shopping offer, should be carefully measured against the individual demands of the Town and the local community which it serves. Historically Town Centres have been places of cultural heritage, local identity and definitive architecture, they should aspire to be the heart of the community.
- 3.3 The local economy will strengthen through the growth of the retail economy and by attracting more substantial investment from further a field. It is vital that the Town Centre's economic performance is monitored through shopping surveys and regular contact with key retailers to ensure that the retail sector is performing well and providing a strong shopping offer to the public.
- 3.4 The maintenance and provision of strong road, rail and bus links to a Town Centre are key to economic growth. Car parking should be within easy reach of the Town Centres facilities and parking costs kept as reasonable as possible.
- 3.5 A strong mix of retail units will encourage 'dwell time', retention of core service providers in the Town Centre will increase footfall throughout the day. Opticians, banks, Post Offices and hairdressers all bring people into the Town Centre on a weekly if not daily basis.

- 3.6 Environmental improvements could focus on managing of the vehicle / pedestrian conflict, the effective resolution of this issue will ensure that a safe pedestrian friendly environment is created. Public realm areas displaying well maintained locally themed public art enhances the street scene and the provision of a clean safe environment will attract investment.
- 3.7 What has become widely known as 'The Cloned High Street' can be avoided if local independent businesses are retained and encouraged in their development. A Town Centre, which offers a difference will attract investment. People are searching for a different shopping experience and will visit a Town, which has its own identity.
- 3.8 Making use of existing office space can generate an additional spend over the lunchtime period. Local authority services relocated in the Town Centre creates additional Town Centre visits and makes the Local Authority more accessible, underlining its commitment to the Town Centre.
- 3.9 A sustainable night time economy attracts users of all ages, giving the Town Centre an added dimension. A destination restaurant offering a unique 'up market' experience cannot only offer a facility to local residents, but also attract customers from a wider area raising the profile of the Town Centre. Developing an all year event programme adds value and makes the Town Centre more attractive to prospective investors.

#### **4 BLACKWOOD TOWN CENTRE DEVELOPMENT**

- 4.1 The new retail development to the north of Blackwood High Street, has brought a series of new stores into the town, these are linked together by attractive public areas. When the north of the Town Centre is viewed from High Street at its junction with Hall Street, there is corridor affect, the buildings restrict the natural light and there is a lack of substantial retail provision. The future public realm improvements for this area in the north of High Street, will continue to 'join up' the established Town Centre with the new retail park. The new public realm works in Hall Street now act as a gateway leading into High Street. The addition of a café quarter at the site of the Old Beer Keller in Hall Street, with the introduction of tables and chairs on the pavement, could create a continental feel and a free flow of pedestrian traffic between the northern end of the Town Centre and High Street.
- 4.2 The Asda store located at the retail park in the north of Blackwood Town Centre funds a bus service for the benefit of their customers. The service operates between the bus station and the store, currently there is no provision to stop in High Street to pick up and drop off passengers. At present the management of Asda are reluctant to consider the introduction of a bus stop on High Street. This service is commercially very successful for the store and is funded solely by Asda for their benefit.
- 4.3 The southern end of High Street currently suffers from poor footfall, much of the shopping provision in this end of the street is made up of service industries including, opticians, phone shops, hairdressers and a veterinary surgery. The core business of traders in the locality is reasonably successful, but business generated by passing trade is low and has declined in recent years.
- 4.4 As the existing business do not generate high footfall in themselves, the provision of a new destination store in the southern end of the High Street would be a factor in increasing the footfall. The current sites of the Post Office and Bingo Hall are of a sufficient size that if future opportunities arise, they may be considered for attracting a major high street name.
- 4.5 The car parks to the rear of High Street currently have no access into the southern end of the street between the shops; therefore people migrate to the public walkway, which leads onto High Street opposite 'Gravel Lane'. A walkway from the car parks could be considered to feed pedestrian traffic through into the south of High Street.

- 4.6 The bus station and The Market Place should dominate the central area of Blackwood Town Centre. The building of a new bus station will dramatically change the feel of the area and deliver a landmark building. Access to Market Place from High Street is narrow and the shopping centre is almost hidden, any measures to bring the High Street and Market Place offer together would benefit both areas and give the Town Centre an area of central focus.
- 4.7 The construction of the new Sirhowy Enterprise Way presents a once in a lifetime opportunity for Blackwood. The new Oakdale Business Park built on the site of the old colliery, will comprise of 170 acres of development land on a 400acre site. With the completion of the new road infrastructure, Oakdale Business Park will be located within a seven-minute drive of Blackwood Town Centre. This development could employ up to 5000 people who are all potential customers for every single business in the Town Centre.
- 4.8 The future of the Blackwood will depend on the ability to capitalise on this opportunity by attracting sustainable long-term investment to improve the scope and quality of the retail offer. If this can be achieved, together with a strengthened transport infrastructure, Blackwood Town Centre can aspire to become a regional shopping destination, serving not only the local population, but also the wider communities of the South East Valleys.

Author: Andrew Highway, Town Centre Development Manager, Economic Development  
Telephone 201443 866213, Email [highwa@caerphilly.gov.uk](mailto:highwa@caerphilly.gov.uk)

Background Papers:  
None

Consultants:  
Ian MacVicar  
Roger Tanner